

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Hua-Deng Relationship

The unusual circumstances surrounding the elevation of Hua Guofeng (Hua Kuo-feng) in 1976 to the posts of party chairman and premier form the basis of an uneasy relationship between the younger Hua and the hard-nosed veteran Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-ping). Hua's career had flourished in 1975 under Deng's de facto stewardship of both the party and government, but Hua would not have risen so far so fast had Deng not been upended by the leftist Gang of Four in April 1976. Official Chinese decisions at that time established a clear link between Hua's rise and Deng's fall. This link remains a sore point in the relationship between the two men, but there are differences as well over the implementation of specific policies and active competition for control over the instruments of power. The relationship has evolved through several stages and now seems to have settled into one in which the two leaders will cope with their differences in somewhat more muted fashion than has been the case in the past. With Deng's preeminence clearly established, neither seems prepared to attempt to oust the other from power. [REDACTED]

This memorandum was prepared by the East Asia-Pacific Division of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis in response to a request from the Department of State. Questions and comments may be addressed to [REDACTED]

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Background

The Chinese now freely admit that with the declining health of Premier Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai) in 1975, and the frail condition of Chairman Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), Deng, then fifth ranking party leader and senior vice premier in the government, was in de facto charge of the party and government. In early 1975, Hua, who had come to the capital in 1971 from Mao's home province to assume a role in the national leadership, was named a vice premier, put in charge of security, and maintained an active role in overseeing agricultural and scientific work. He was clearly being groomed for bigger things, and this process was carried out, with no apparent discord, under Deng's leadership. [REDACTED]

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After Zhou Enlai's death in January 1976, the Gang of Four, which had been opposing Deng on personal and policy grounds for several years, stepped up its efforts to prevent his succession to the premiership. In this, they may have had at least the tacit approval of Mao. The party was sharply divided--Deng had almost as many enemies as friends in the leadership at the time--and could not agree to name either Deng or the Gang of Four's candidate to the premiership. Hua was chosen as a compromise and named "acting" premier. [REDACTED]

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The Gang of Four then escalated its attacks on Deng, and by late March it became necessary for the party to decide formally on Deng's fate. Deng's supporters organized a show of support on Chinese memorial day in the guise of commemorating the late Zhou, Deng's patron. The Gang's intervention in this endeavor led to rioting by millions of people in the capital. The rioting was blamed on Deng and was the official reason for his ouster. The Gang was nevertheless thwarted in its efforts to profit by Deng's demise when Hua was named premier and "first" vice chairman of the party, thus making him the logical choice to succeed the ailing Mao as chairman. When Mao died in September, Hua became chairman, the only person in Chinese communist history to hold both the party chairmanship and the premiership. [REDACTED]

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Had Deng not overplayed his hand by organizing a public show of support, he might have weathered the Gang's April assault and could then have become premier. Although Hua was by then an important figure, he clearly rose higher as a result of Deng's ouster than he would have otherwise. [REDACTED]

Deng's Return

Deng's return was a foregone conclusion once the Gang of Four was arrested in October 1976. The process was made difficult, however, by the opposition of some who had crossed swords with Deng in the past and were afraid that the always vengeful Deng would take action against them. These people formed a natural alliance with Hua, who was a pleasant change from Mao: unassuming in his ways, his accessibility, low-key in his approach. Hua's personal traits, however, were not enough to win him large numbers of political supporters throughout the party hierarchy. He knew he was no match for Deng, whose forceful personality and huge network of personal and political allies throughout the nation could enable him to eclipse Hua. The new chairman, realizing he could not block Deng's return--indeed that would only add to his problems if he tried--stalled for time in order to more firmly lay down roots within the party. Others uneasy about the prospect of Deng's return may have been bolder in actually trying to prevent it. In any event, the delaying tactics were added to Deng's list of grievances against some in the leadership and probably did not serve to endear Hua to him either. [REDACTED]

Deng returned in July 1977, in advance of a timetable established by Hua earlier in the year. The party adopted resolutions restoring Deng to all the positions he had held before his 1976 demise and confirming Hua as party chairman. The adoption of the two resolutions at the same time was ipso facto acknowledgement that Deng's return had raised questions about the legitimacy of Hua's position, questions related directly to the decisions of April 1976 ousting Deng and elevating Hua in his stead. [REDACTED]

Deng had to agree to some conditions upon his return. He pledged his loyalty to Hua as party chairman--although not as premier--and announced that he was Hua's "good assistant," thus subordinating himself to Hua but underscoring his own vital role. He also agreed to refrain from seeking revenge against those who may have opposed his return or who had differed with him in the past. The latter stipulation was important to Hua, not necessarily because he had reason to fear that Deng would try to unseat him but because those Deng was likely to turn against were Hua's main supporters in the upper reaches of the party. That these people were united more in their opposition to Deng than in their loyalty to Hua was less important than their ability to furnish Hua with some measure of support at crucial party meetings.

Open Differences

After an initial display of solidarity, Hua and Deng began to openly show their differences. Some of these moves were symbolic, others were more substantive. Included in the symbolic gestures were the failure of the two to appear together and the publication in the party's official newspaper of a photograph in which the upraised arm of Hua completely blocked from view the face of Deng. Such gestures are designed to send signals to others in the party and do not occur without careful staging.

On a more issue-oriented level, Hua and Deng differed over the scope of the campaign against followers of the Gang of Four. Hua wanted a limited effort, not only because he feared creating a volatile political situation but also because many would-be victims, having risen to prominence like him during the Cultural Revolution, were potential supporters. Consequently, he repeatedly intervened to support Beijing (Peking) party boss Wu De (Wu Te), who was under Deng's fire for being the last senior official to attack him by name in 1976, for having called a halt to the demonstrations in April 1976, and probably for attempting to forestall his return. Wu had been in political trouble at least as early as January 1977, even before Deng's return, but Hua's apparent support for him and other beleaguered officials slowed Deng's pursuit of them.

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In public forums Deng and Hua made speeches that took sharply different tacks. At a science conference in March 1978, Deng virtually relieved scientists of any responsibility to prove their political reliability and gave them carte blanche to pursue research unencumbered by party regulation; Hua reiterated the more standard line that scientists must follow the correct political line to remain in good standing. At a conference in June, Deng unveiled his own "ideology"--one that in fact eschewed rigid adherence to any ideology but put a premium instead on practical approaches to problem-solving. In this, he outlined the need to revise or ignore the teachings of Mao or other communist theoreticians. This speech was the basis of the upswing in the effort to desanctify Mao. Hua has been less willing--for the obvious reason that he is the embodiment of the Mao legacy--to cast Mao's teachings to the winds. [REDACTED]

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Unequal Partnership

Today the two men seem willing--perhaps in the interest of economic progress--to air their differences in more subtle ways. At a central committee plenum last month, for example, an unpublished speech by Hua called for "closing" the campaign against Gang of Four followers and "shifting" work to the economic modernization program, positions probably not endorsed by Deng. [REDACTED]

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Deng wants a sweeping purge of those he fears do not fully support the modernization policies. He is willing to risk the instability this could cause in the short term to insure the continuation of the modernization drive in the future. The more cautious Hua seems less willing to take the immediate risk. He also may be more reluctant than Deng to embark on certain controversial economic policies--particularly those calling for large foreign involvement--for fear that a backlash could develop if the economic program does not make the hoped-for gains. The plenum dealt at length with the modernization question but did not publicly endorse the specific foreign trade policies China has been considering. [REDACTED]

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The communique released at the conclusion of the plenum seemed to issue a rebuke to Deng by warning that the personal views of leading officials must not be regarded as instructions. Often Deng has issued instructions in his own name on personnel and other politically sensitive matters and has made decisions without consulting with others. On the other hand, the plenum's call to lower the profile of individual leaders has affected Hua more than anyone else--he has not been called since the plenum by his usual title "wise leader." Thus, the slimmist trappings of a personality cult have been denied him. [REDACTED]

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The treatment of visiting foreign dignitaries indicates that Hua and Deng occupy separate but roughly equal slots in the leadership. Unlike the practice in Mao's day when first Zhou Enlai and later Deng would accompany the visitor to his session with Mao, thereby acknowledging Zhou's and Deng's clear subordination to him, Deng does not accompany visitors to their meetings with Hua. [REDACTED]

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The appointment of a close Deng associate, the 63 year old Hu Yaobang (Hu Yao-pang), as secretary-general of the party sheds further light on the Hua-Deng relationship. Hu is now in charge of the party's daily affairs. If Deng had full confidence in Hua, he would not have felt a need to put his own protege into the post. Hu is in a strong position to pose a serious challenge to Hua after Deng's passing. [REDACTED]

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Ironically, Deng's current position in the leadership could be more useful to Hua than will be Deng's death. Neither Hu nor anyone else will challenge Hua with Deng around; that is Deng's role and he has performed it well. But the one factor that made Hua an ideal compromise choice--his lack of a huge personal power base--will leave him vulnerable to threats to his position over the longer term. [REDACTED]

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Deng's public disavowal of his interest in the premiership, while it does not in itself preclude a move against Hua, makes one less likely. At this point, Deng hardly needs the title, although he undoubtedly wanted it very much in the past. The fact that the 74 year old

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Deng is making the long trip to Washington rather than the 57 year old Hua is proof enough of who the more important man is. Deng's public comments on the need to have the younger Hua as premier leave the impression--probably not unintended--that Hua in fact serves by Deng's leave. Therefore, so long as Deng does not mount an effort to unseat Hua, his position is secure. It will be less secure when this unusual "protector" leaves the political scene.

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